



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

HARVARD HYMNS

WARREN SEYMOUR ARCHIBALD

PITTSFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS.

I

Most readers of this article have sung, and many have learned by heart, a noble Christmas hymn whose music is now heard in more than one continent:—

It came upon the midnight clear,
That glorious song of old;

but few of those who sing and love it know that it was written by a country minister who graduated from the Harvard Divinity School. Fewer still are aware that a series of men have proceeded from this department of Harvard University who, for now almost a hundred years, have maintained this succession in sacred song. What may properly be called a school of religious poetry constitutes a worthy part of the contribution to literary culture which Harvard has made and which through many generations formed the peculiar and greatest distinction of New England.

In this matter Harvard may claim to have carried on the tradition of the English universities. One of the circumstances which lend dignity and honor to Oxford and Cambridge has been the presence there from time to time of men who are truly called religious poets, because they have had a genius for expressing in lyric and epic verse that interior mystery which gives our humanity "her kindred with the stars." Such men at the English universities occupy no inconspicuous place in the records of English literature. No description of the seventeenth century, for example, could be complete without mention of Herbert, Crashaw, and Vaughan. Nor, indeed, could the temper of that intensely religious period in the first part of the seventeenth century be understood without this lasting expression of that devout piety, pas-

sionate love, and high thought, which in various ways made the period so tumultuous. In Herbert we see the moral earnestness and sincere piety which have always characterized a large element in the English-speaking race. In Crashaw can be studied the ecstatic and mystical spirit of Roman Catholicism which found in his time a visible expression in the religious brotherhood gathered about Nicholas Ferrar at Little Gidding,—a spirit which has received renewed and beautiful utterance in the religious romance of *John Inglesant*. In Vaughan, the poet in the Welsh valley of Usk, the legendary home of Arthur, appears that Celtic strain which in our English race has been a highway for visions and the visitation of dreams. And the name of Milton, who was the contemporary of these more quiet souls, needs only to be mentioned in order to recall his relation to the religious strain in our inheritance. These traits and these traditions have had a certain parallel here at Harvard; for if no harvest of song was among the first-fruits of New England,—no one will be so patriotic as to include Michael Wigglesworth's *Day of Doom* among religious lyrics,—nevertheless the seed was planted which in good time brought forth, if not an hundred fold, at least a reasonable thirty or forty.

The list of these Harvard poets includes O. B. Frothingham, Emerson, H. H. Furness, Henry Ware, Jr., E. H. Sears, James Freeman Clarke, Samuel Longfellow, Samuel Johnson, J. W. Chadwick, F. L. Hosmer, William C. Gannett, and others,—men whose names are many of them less familiar than are their hymns, but who possessed a certain unity and fellowship of deep spiritual feeling which makes it right to call them a school of writers of hymns. It is a striking fact that verses which have since travelled “over the hills and far away” among books and people were written by men while they were still students in the Divinity School, and frequently for the old Divinity Commencement, called Visitation Day, at which, as in other institutions, a hymn written by a student was a prominent part. One of the best of these was written by Edward Rowland Sill, whom most of us know as the Californian poet, not as a student of divinity at Harvard. His hymn is a lyric invocation for the gifts of the spirit.

Send down thy truth, O God!
Too long the shadows frown,
Too long the darkened way we've trod,
Thy truth, O Lord, send down!

Send down thy spirit free,
Till wilderness and town
One temple for thy worship be,
Thy spirit, O, send down!

Send down thy love, thy life,
Our lesser lives to crown,
And cleanse them of their hate and strife,
Thy living love send down!

Send down thy peace, O Lord!
Earth's bitter voices drown
In one deep ocean of accord,
Thy peace, O God, send down!

II

A particular description of all these men would be tedious. So let us select some typical ones, whose work possesses special interest. We may divide the writers of the school into three groups. The first dates from about 1820, and includes Henry Ware, Jr., Frederic H. Hedge, Andrews Norton, Stephen G. Bulfinch, James Freeman Clarke, Theodore Parker, Edmund H. Sears, Horace H. Furness, and C. A. Bartol. All these men attained distinction. Ware, Hedge, and Norton occupied professorships at Harvard. Bartol was for fifty-two years minister of the old West Church in Boston. Clarke was for almost half a century minister of the Church of the Disciples in Boston. Theodore Parker speaks for himself. Sears is well known not only as a hymn writer but as the author of a book of rare spiritual insight, *The Fourth Gospel the Heart of Christ*. Furness was an active pastor in Philadelphia for fifty years, and as minister active and emeritus served his church for the amazingly long term of seventy-one years.

Perhaps the best-known hymns in this group were written by Clarke, Sears, Furness, and Parker. Clarke wrote a number of

hymns, but that which has travelled farthest is the one written in 1856:—

Father, to us thy children, humbly kneeling,
 Conscious of weakness, ignorance, sin, and shame,
 Give such a force of holy thought and feeling
 That we may live to glorify thy name,

That we may conquer base desire and passion,
 That we may rise from selfish thought and will,
 O'ercome the world's allurements, threat, and fashion,
 Walk humbly, gently, leaning on thee still.

Let all thy goodness by our minds be seen,
 Let all thy mercy on our souls be sealed.
 Lord, if thou wilt, thy power can make us clean;
 O, speak the word, thy servants shall be healed.

Among these men, the name of Sears is perhaps the least known, and yet, of all the hymns, his are probably the most famous. He preferred the life of a country parson in Wayland, Lancaster, and Weston, Massachusetts, because this gave him more leisure for study and writing. His two Christmas hymns are sung now in all churches in America and Great Britain. Almost every one knows the Christmas song:—

It came upon the midnight clear,
 That glorious song of old,
 From angels bending near the earth
 To touch their harps of gold:
 "Peace on the earth, good-will to men,
 From heaven's all-gracious King."
 The world in solemn stillness lay
 To hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come,
 With peaceful wings unfurled,
 And still their heavenly music floats
 O'er all the weary world;
 Above its sad and lowly plains
 They bend on hovering wing,
 And ever o'er its Babel sounds
 The blessed angels sing.

And ye, beneath life's crushing load
Whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way,
With painful steps and slow,—
Look now, for glad and golden hours
Come swiftly on the wing:
O, rest beside the weary road,
And hear the angels sing!

For lo! the days are hastening on
By prophet bards foretold,
When with the ever-circling years
Comes round the age of gold,
When Peace shall over all the earth
Its ancient splendors fling,
And the whole world give back the song
Which now the angels sing.

Another hymn of his is almost as well known, and appears in most collections as a companion of the first one:—

Calm on the listening ear of night
Come heaven's melodious strains.

Furness wrote an unusually large number of religious lyrics. They have a simplicity of phrase and clearness of thought which remind one of many of the hymns written by Keble and Faber. Of them I venture to think that his vesper hymn will compel the hearts of the largest congregation. I think I have read somewhere that Emerson called it the finest hymn in the world. At any rate it holds a high place.

Slowly, by thy hand unfurled,
Down around the weary world
Falls the darkness. O, how still
Is the working of thy will!

Mighty Maker, ever nigh,
Work in me as silently,
Veil the day's distracting sights,
Show me heaven's eternal lights;

Living worlds to view be brought
In the boundless realms of thought,
High and infinite desires,
Flaming like those upper fires;

Holy truth, eternal right,
Let them break upon my sight,
Let them shine, serene and still,
And with light my being fill.

Attention has frequently been called to men who have reached and held a high distinction by virtue of one book or of one poem. Gray, for example, is practically known only through his "Elegy in a Country Churchyard." The same remark can be made of Theodore Parker as a religious poet. He is known only, and yet very widely and justly, through his hymn beginning,—

O thou great Friend to all the sons of men.

It is interesting that this originally appeared as a sonnet, of which the hymn gives the first three quatrains. As a hymn, it was first published by Longfellow and Johnson in their *Book of Hymns*.

III

The second group dates from the years following 1840, and includes Samuel Longfellow, Samuel Johnson, T. W. Higginson, O. B. Frothingham, and Jones Very. These were an interesting group of men, both because of their high work in religious poetry and because of their connection with Transcendentalism. Samuel Longfellow and Samuel Johnson may be spoken of together, because they were friends who found a happy partnership in writing and thinking. As seniors in the Divinity School, they compiled an anthology of religious poems of unusual value. "They read, criticised, and compared literally thousands of hymns, ransacking the collections of all denominations, and the poetry of other languages besides our own; gleaned even in the newspapers, and utilizing portions of poems by skilful adaptation. . . . It is probable that Mrs. Adams's 'Nearer, my God, to thee,' here first appeared, at least in an American collection. Beautiful hymns from Sears, Furness, Clarke, H. B. Stowe, Emerson, H. W. Longfellow, Trench, Very, Lowell, and others still fresh, if not wholly new, enriched the volume. They diligently gathered material, also, from private sources, and did not fail in

the courage it then required to invite contributions from Theodore Parker. A number of the hymns were original, written by the compilers themselves or by their friends, partly with a view to the particular aims of the new collection. Most, if not all of these, they published as anonymous, and not all have ever been credited to their authors; but among them were some of the finest, which have remained among the treasures of our hymnology."¹

One hymn in this collection deserves particular mention. They found it in an American newspaper. It was anonymous, but they felt at once its lofty mood and exquisite phrasing. They recognized its nobility, and placed it in their book. It was Newman's "Lead, kindly Light." That discovery speaks well for the editors' range and insight. It must be noted, however, in all honesty, that they made several changes in the phrasing of the hymn, which were decidedly no improvement, and which they had the good judgment to remove in a later edition. This tendency to make alterations in the poems, unfortunately present in the *Book of Hymns*, was even more conspicuous in the revised edition which appeared in 1864 under a new title, *Hymns of the Spirit*.

T. W. Higginson, one of the contributors to the *Book of Hymns*, writes, "My sister, an intimate friend of Mr. Longfellow, satirized this propensity in one of the nonsense stanzas then so prevalent. It must be premised that as both of the editors were named Samuel, their book was often characterized the 'Sam-Book.'

'There were two Sams of America
Who belonged to the profession called "clerica."
They hunted up hymns
And cut off their limbs,
These truculent Sams of America.'

Longfellow entered heartily into this joke, and illustrated the verse with a pen-and-ink sketch, representing two young men with large shears cutting up rolls of paper. The likeness of Johnson, who was very handsome, with the air of a high-caste Parsee or Assyrian, was unmistakable."²

¹ Samuel Longfellow, by Joseph May, p. 50.

² *Ibid.*, p. 54.

The chief interest of these two, and that of all this group, lies for us in their connection with Transcendentalism; for their hymns are spiritual ballads in that border-land of idealism. Most of these men lived in the glory of that movement, for in 1843, the year that Longfellow and Johnson entered the Divinity School, Emerson printed *Nature*. The work of these two men is very likely the best representative of this group and period. It is hardly too much to say that in their religious poetry Transcendentalism is seen at its best, because in these lyrics was uttered the finer spiritual character of that movement without exaggeration and fantastic obscurity. Their poetry emphasized and expressed the spirit in man answering to the spirit in God, the divine in humanity calling to the divine in the Infinite Father. All their poems have a common spirit and a classic beauty, a passion for simplicity and the universal. We shall search far before we find a nobler utterance of that truth that "God is through all and in you all" than is given in this poem by Samuel Longfellow:—

God of the earth, the sky, the sea,
Maker of all above, below,
Creation lives and moves in thee;
Thy present life through all doth flow.

Thy love is in the sunshine's glow,
Thy life is in the quickening air;
When lightnings flash and storm-winds blow,
There is thy power, thy law is there.

We feel thy calm at evening's hour,
Thy grandeur in the march of night,
And when the morning breaks in power,
We hear thy word, "Let there be light."

But higher far, and far more clear,
Thee in man's spirit we behold,
Thine image and thyself are there,—
The indwelling God, proclaimed of old.

A fine enthusiasm, a militant faith, chants in the lines on the Church which both men wrote. It is very striking to find two

poems written by two friends on the same theme, in the same period, both attaining distinction and yet remaining quite dissimilar. The hymn by Samuel Johnson on the City of God is as truly positive as if it had come from the mediaeval "ages of faith":—

City of God, how broad and far
Outspread thy walls sublime!
The true thy chartered freemen are,
Of every age and clime.

One holy Church, one army strong,
One steadfast high intent,
One working band, one harvest-song,
One King omnipotent!

How purely hath thy speech come down
From man's primeval youth!
How grandly hath thine empire grown
Of freedom, love, and truth!

How gleam thy watch-fires through the night
With never fainting ray!
How rise thy towers, serene and bright,
To meet the dawning day!

In vain the surge's angry shock,
In vain the drifting sands;
Unharm'd upon the eternal rock,
The eternal city stands.

And few religious poets in Oxford or in Cambridge have with any more truth, simplicity, and spiritual ardor given utterance to their century's vision of the Church than has Samuel Longfellow in the cadence of these lines:—

One holy Church of God appears
Through every age and race,
Unwasted by the lapse of years,
Unchanged by changing place.

From oldest time, on farthest shores,
Beneath the pine or palm,
One unseen presence she adores,
With silence or with psalm.

Her priests are all God's faithful sons,
 To serve the world raised up;
 The pure in heart, her baptized ones;
 Love, her communion-cup.

The truth is her prophetic gift,
 The soul her sacred page;
 And feet on mercy's errands swift
 Do make her pilgrimage.

O living Church, thine errand speed,
 Fulfil thy task sublime,
 With bread of life earth's hunger feed,
 Redeem the evil time!

IV

The third group dates from about 1860 and the following years, and includes E. R. Sill, F. L. Hosmer, W. C. Gannett, J. W. Chadwick, and S. C. Beach. They are connected by inheritance with the Transcendentalists, and they maintain the lyric strain which characterized Samuel Longfellow and his friends. Sill is known to most of us as a poet who belongs to the same circle of thought as Emerson, Arnold, Tennyson,—a man whose message is always ethical, touched with gracious dignity and wistful visions. Doubtless few think of him as a religious poet or hymn writer. But like Theodore Parker he has written one hymn which is widely known and conspicuous for its spirit of devotion:—

Send down thy truth, O God.

Another member of this group, John White Chadwick, has the distinction of having written a hymn for the old Visitation Day which, like Sill's, promises to endure. One stanza will indicate its quality:—

Eternal Ruler of the ceaseless round
 Of circling planets singing on their way,
 Guide of the nations from the night profound
 Into the glory of the perfect day,
 Rule in our hearts, that we may ever be
 Guided, and strengthened, and upheld by thee.

This exalted invocation is a modern psalm in its ease, clearness, and emotion.

Of this group, the two men who seem most prominent, and who continue the work of Longfellow and Johnson, are William C. Gannett and Frederick L. Hosmer. Both have the lyric quality, the ability to express religious feeling in simple and unencumbered lines. Both are in a large measure unfettered by the weight of commonplace, unburdened by heavily gilded words or phrases of an ancient symbolism. It is wholly proper, of course, to employ the older metaphors and epithets, but in that case, if the hymn is to possess a real and honest distinction, the language must be confessedly archaic. It is legitimate, and in many cases profitable, to be pre-raphaelite, but then the work must be signed "P. R. B." These poets are not pre-raphaelite. They are men of their own time. And they are also, as every poet must be, men who write in the light of the Eternal. The feeling which they express is of the eternal Spirit in man, which is from everlasting to everlasting; the utterance is distinctly colored by the thought of their own time.

Gannett's poetry has a singular felicity, a sharp, clear, New England tone and atmosphere. His words are as distinct as green trees in a snow-covered field; they have the clearness and sharpness which in a New England winter on a bright sunny day the hills, the boundary lines, the solitary trees outlined against the sky impressively possess. For example, these lines, which have for their text the familiar words "Consider the lilies, how they grow," show both this clearness of thought and felicity in expression:—

He hides within the lily
A strong and tender care,
That wins the earth-born atoms
To glory of the air;
He weaves the shining garments
Unceasingly and still,
Along the quiet waters,
In niches of the hill.

We linger at the vigil
With him who bent the knee
To watch the old-time lilies
In distant Galilee;

And still the worship deepens,
And quickens into new,
As brightening down the ages
God's secret thrilleth through.

O Toiler of the lily,
Thy touch is in the Man!
No leaf that dawns to petal
But hints the angel-plan.
The flower horizons open!
The blossom vaster shows!
We hear the wide worlds echo,—
See how the lily grows!

Shy yearnings of the savage,
Unfolding thought by thought,
To holy lives are lifted,
To visions fair are wrought;
The races rise and cluster,
And evils fade and fall,
Till chaos blooms to beauty,
Thy purpose crowning all!

Hosmer's poetry reminds one very much of Samuel Longfellow. It has the same lucidity, the same skilful employment of common words in such a way that they assume noble and dignified phrasing. Words are very much like people. The Great Master of men could out of fishermen and publicans make the noble army of martyrs. And a master of words, like Lincoln, can out of very common words construct the immemorial prayer of a nation. This is difficult. It is seldom achieved, yet the achievement is the goal of all who strive to utter the thought of God in the words of man. Whenever it is done, whether in large or small degree, we see the best work. Something of this achievement is found in Hosmer's religious poetry. He can express exalted thought in single and intelligible words, the clearness of which does not detract from their felicity. There is no thought more exalted than that of the mystery of God, and few expressions of that mystery have more sweetness and light than these lines:—

O thou, in all thy might so far,
In all thy love so near,
Beyond the range of sun and star,
And yet beside us here,—

What heart can comprehend thy name,
Or, searching, find thee out,
Who art within, a quickening flame,
A presence round about?

Yet, though I know thee but in part,
I ask not, Lord, for more:
Enough for me to know thou art,
To love thee and adore.

O, sweeter than aught else besides,
The tender mystery
That like a veil of shadow hides
The light I may not see!

And dearer than all things I know
Is childlike faith to me,
That makes the darkest way I go
An open path to thee.

V

The men whom we have considered in these three groups constitute, as I have said, a school in religious poetry. For almost one hundred years they have expressed in lyric verse, much of it enduring, much of it beautiful, one phase of the choice religious life of New England. This is significant, if one said no more; but we cannot help remembering that New England, with her theology and her conscience, her religion and her ancient parishes, with her godly men and women strengthened by the austerity of that theology, ennobled by the vigor of that conscience, and given a gracious sweetness and dignity by that spiritual religion,—this New England has been no inconsiderable part of America. At her best she and her ancient college at Cambridge have stood for idealism. Some have asked what centre is there at Harvard around which her activities may gather? The answer is, this

idealism. The ideal for which scholars in old Cambridge fled to a wilderness, for which the college was founded, which has nurtured and bred her poets, her scholars, her divines, her men of affairs and of simplicity of heart and life. The college has endured only because it has by faith seen the invisible. And again some will say, "New England theology has collapsed; what standard is there to which New England Puritanism can repair?" And again the answer is, idealism. That was the life of the New England theology. It has never passed away. It is indestructible. It can build once more a noble mansion for the mind; can rear once more its systems of divinity, its intellectual homes. This faith is established in the knowledge that the soil where fine religious poetry grows is good soil. If the soil has hitherto brought forth these flowers, it promises a yet richer harvest in song and thought.

Of this idealism, this faith, these poets of religion have given noble and true expression. They have kept alive from year to year the sacred fire which burns below all systems of thought and bodies of divinity, which glows in the heart of man and flames in the centre of the universe. They have found the common faith below the sectarian superstructure, the deep foundations on which every spiritual edifice is reared. These poems have survived the controversies and divisions, and they have entered into the rest even of hymn books foreign to their authors' creed.

The most significant remark, therefore, which can be made about this school of poetry is this: these men have expressed that spirit of idealism which is after all the very essence of our New England theology, the fibre of New England character, the common faith of the ancestral order. They have given utterance to this idealism in lyric verse, set to the music of old tunes, —the truest and most permanent tabernacle for a spirit so fragile and so indestructible.